

Ideas for Successful Promotion of Native Plants

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The value of landscaping with native plants is rapidly gaining recognition among Idaho homeowners. However, installation of native landscapes lags behind acceptance due to a lack of know-how and a perceived shortage of attractive and interesting native landscape plant materials. This situation creates unmet demand and results in a remarkable marketing opportunity for all levels of the nursery industry. The keys to capitalizing on this opportunity are threefold: 1) developing an inventory of outstanding native landscape plants, 2) providing homeowner education concerning native plants and their uses, and 3) properly presenting native plants, including demonstrating gardens for showing potential in the landscape.

Developing an Inventory of Native Plants: Most nurseries already handle a large inventory of superior native plants, including such standard materials as Colorado blue spruce, quaking aspen, red-twig dogwood, ninebark, juniper, blanketflower, columbine, and blue fescue. To start with, successful promotion of native plants can be accomplished by relabeling and relocating these standard materials within the nursery. Additionally, there are many less common, outstanding native plant materials that are in production and relatively easy to obtain from wholesalers.

Homeowner Education: A common perception among homeowners is that native landscapes, by definition, look like a sagebrush prairie. This “wild” look is not a preferred style for most homeowners. It is important to correct this design misconception by providing customers with ideas on creating attractive landscapes with native species. It is also important to develop written materials that introduce less familiar plant materials (with pictures) and give homeowners ideas on how to incorporate native plant materials into established landscapes (such as the use of shade-tolerant native shrubs and perennials around mature trees).

Proper Presentation of Native Plant Materials: Native plants require the same presentation techniques to attract buyers as used for traditional plant materials. Ideally, native plants should be segregated and identified, arranged in an attractive manner, and provided with effective signage. Sub-grouping the plants by water usage may also be valuable. Pictures are very important for plants that lack “impulse buy” traits in pot culture. It is also essential that plants are healthy and well-manicured.

On-site demonstration gardens will be invaluable for marketing native plants. Gardens can be arranged to illustrate different landscape styles (e.g. modified traditional landscape, dry woodland landscape, or xeric shrub/steppe landscape). These demonstration gardens need not be large or complex, but should represent mixed beds with trees, shrubs, and perennials. Also, information should be provided about each landscape style with regard to their “green impact”, including potential for water conservation,

possibility for reduced applications of pesticides and fertilizers, wildlife habitat improvement, and attraction of valuable pollinators.

Native plants suggested for use in three illustrative water-conserving landscape styles.

A **Modified Traditional Landscape** has the look and feel of traditional landscape designs common to most Idaho gardens. This style consists of large trees intermingled with shrub and flower beds. It is called “modified” because the use of native plant materials allows a reduction in water application (20-40% less) and reduced use of fertilizers and other resources.

A **Dry Woodland Landscape** also has many of the characteristics of a traditional landscape, but the plant material is even more drought tolerant, allowing for application of 40-60% less water. It is often typified by the use of smaller trees, drought tolerant shrubs, drought-tolerant groundcover plants, and perennials that thrive in both sun and/or dry shade.

A **Xeric Shrub/Steppe Landscape** is more typical of current perceptions of a water-conserving landscape. It consists of very drought tolerant plants. Trees are small and limited in number. Shrubs and perennials are the dominant features of the landscape. In southern Idaho, this type of landscape will need some supplemental irrigation, but will thrive with 60-80% less water than a traditional landscape.

Examples of plant materials suitable for each of the described landscape styles.

Modified Traditional	Dry Woodland	Shrub/Steppe
Trees		
Blue spruce (<i>Picea pungens</i>)	Limber pine (<i>Pinus flexilis</i>)	Pinyon pine (<i>Pinus edulis</i> or <i>monophylla</i>)
Alberta spruce (<i>Picea glauca</i>)	Ponderosa pine (<i>Pinus ponderosa</i>)	Rocky Mtn Juniper (<i>Juniperus scopulorum</i>)
White fir (<i>Abies concolor</i>)	Bristlecone pine (<i>Pinus aristata</i>)	Mountain mahogany (<i>Cercocarpus ledifolius</i>)
Boxelder (<i>Acer negundo</i>)	Red chokecherry (<i>Prunus virginiana</i>)	Gambel oak (<i>Quercus gambelii</i>)
Quaking aspen (<i>Populus tremuloides</i>)	Bigtooth maple (<i>Acer grandidentatum</i>)	Desert willow (<i>Chilopsis linearis</i>)
Western red birch (<i>Betula occidentalis</i>)	Vine maple (<i>Acer circinatum</i>)	
Paper birch (<i>Betula papyrifera</i>)		
Shrubs		
Bearberry (<i>Arctostaphylos uva-ursi</i>)	Dwarf Oregon grape (<i>Mahonia repens</i>)	Juniper (<i>Juniperus communis, horizontalis</i>)
Dwarf conifers (Various fir, spruce)	Dwarf conifers (Various spruce, pine)	Dwarf junipers (<i>Juniperus communis</i>)
Oregon grape (<i>Mahonia aquifolium</i>)	Mountain lover (<i>Paxistima canbyi</i>)	Smooth sumac (<i>Rhus glabra</i>)
Red-twig dogwood (<i>Cornus sericea</i>)	Serviceberry (<i>Amelanchier spp.</i>)	Staghorn sumac (<i>Rhus typhina</i>)
Mockorange (<i>Philadelphus lewisii</i>)	Rockspray (<i>Holodiscus discolor</i>)	Oakleaf sumac (<i>Rhus trilobata</i>)
Ninebark (<i>Physocarpus spp.</i>)	Cinquefoil (<i>Potentilla fruticosa</i>)	Snowberry (<i>Symphoricarpos spp.</i>)
Red-flowered currant (<i>Ribes sanguineus</i>)	Fragrant sumac (<i>Rhus aromatica</i>)	Fernbush (<i>Chamaebatiaria millefolium</i>)
Cranberry bush (<i>Viburnum trilobum</i>)	Golden currant (<i>Ribes aureum</i>)	Buckwheat (<i>Eriogonum umbellatum</i>)
	Blue elderberry (<i>Sambucus caerulea</i>)	Yucca (<i>Yucca spp.</i>)
Perennials		
Rocky Mtn columbine (<i>Aquilegia coerulea</i>)	Hummingbird mint (<i>Agastache cana</i>)	Yarrow (<i>Achillea millefolium</i>)
Showy milkweed (<i>Asclepias tuberosa</i>)	Sunset hyssop (<i>Agastache rupestris</i>)	Pussytoes (<i>Antennaria rosea</i>)
Coral bells (<i>Heuchera spp.</i>)	Golden columbine (<i>Aquilegia chrysantha</i>)	Utah columbine (<i>Aquilegia scopulorum</i>)
Penstemon (<i>P. whippleanus, ovatus</i>)	Silver sage (<i>Artemisia ludoviciana</i>)	Chocolate flower (<i>Berlandiera lyrata</i>)
Firechalice (<i>Zauschneria garrettii</i>)	Sticky geranium (<i>Geranium viscosissimum</i>)	Blanketflower (<i>Gaillardia spp.</i>)
Wild strawberry (<i>Frageria virginiana</i>)	Blue flax (<i>Linum lewisii</i>)	Gaura (<i>Gaura lindheimeri</i>)
Blue camas (<i>Camas quamash</i>)	Penstemon (<i>P. strictus, barbatus</i>)	Penstemon (<i>P. pinifolius, rostriflorus</i>)
Western sword fern (<i>Polystichum munitum</i>)	Cushion phlox (<i>Phlox douglasii or kelseyi</i>)	Evening primrose (<i>Oenothera spp.</i>)
Male fern (<i>Dropteris filix-mas</i>)	Prairie Smoke (<i>Geum triflorum</i>)	Mexican hat (<i>Ratibida columnifera</i>)
Deer fern (<i>Blechnum spicant</i>)	Coreopsis (<i>Coreopsis tinctoria</i>)	
Grasses		
Tufted-hairgrass (<i>Deschampsia caespitosa</i>)	Blue fescue (<i>Festuco idahoensis</i>)	Little bluestem (<i>schizachyrium scoparium</i>)
Switchgrass (<i>Panicum virgatum</i>)	Indian grass (<i>Sorghastrum nutans</i>)	Giant sacaton (<i>Sporobolus wrightii</i>)